

CLEAN COPY OF THE AMENDED CLAIMS

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1. An apparatus for loading an article from a first conveyor section onto a pallet situated on a second conveyor section, comprising:  
a pusher mechanism for pushing the article from the first conveyor section toward the pallet on the second conveyor section; and  
an extension fork assembly including:  
a stationary transfer surface between the first conveyor section and the second conveyor section configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross;  
a number of elongated forks configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross; and  
a drive mechanism connected to said number of forks and operable to move said number of forks between a retracted position adjacent said stationary transfer surface and an extended position adjacent the pallet on the second conveyor section.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said stationary transfer surface includes a number of elongated beams extending between the first conveyor section and the second conveyor section.

B<sub>2</sub>

4. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said extension fork assembly includes a plurality of elongated beams and a plurality of elongated forks interleaved with said plurality of elongated beams.

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6. The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein each of said plurality of elongated forks includes an upper surface configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross.

7. The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said upper surface of each of said plurality of elongated forks is situated at or below said stationary transfer surface.

14. A system for loading an article onto a pallet, comprising:  
a first conveyor section initially transporting the article;  
a second conveyor section carrying the pallet; and  
a transfer apparatus disposed between said first conveyor section and  
said second conveyor section, said transfer apparatus including;  
a pusher mechanism for pushing the article from said first conveyor  
section toward the pallet on said second conveyor section; and  
an extension fork assembly including;  
a stationary transfer surface between said first conveyor  
section and said second conveyor section configured to support the  
article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross;  
a number of elongated forks configured to support the article  
as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross; and  
a drive mechanism connected to said number of forks and  
operable to move said number of forks between a retracted position  
adjacent said stationary transfer surface and an extended position  
over said second conveyor section adjacent the pallet carried  
thereon.

B4